

Lost Rocket Ruled Out As Mystery Satellite

Air Force official information channels today ruled out the possibility that the mystery satellite now circling the world is a lost rocket from an old Discoverer satellite shot—despite the opinion expressed yesterday by Air Force Secretary Sharp.

Air Research and Development Command sources said there was no chance that it is the second stage of a Discoverer even though the stage is about the same size as the dark satellite.

All of the Discoverer second stages have disintegrated and fallen to earth except one, Discoverer VIII. And the Discoverer VIII carrier rocket was spotted only yesterday whizzing around the earth in an entirely different orbit.

The mystery satellite has an orbit 134 miles from the earth at its closest point and 1,074 miles at its farthest. The Discoverer rocket yesterday had a perigee of 103 miles and an apogee of 1,000.

Speculate on Parachute

There is speculation — and this is just a wild guess in Air Force circles — that the dark satellite could be Discoverer VIII's nose cone plus a parachute streaming behind. The unknown object is about 20 feet long. The Discoverer nose cone is about 5 feet long, but it has a 20-foot parachute attached.

Lt. Gen. James M. Gavin, retired chief of Army research and development, said he has no inside information, but believes the mystery object is a Russian space spy that might even be able to distinguish one plane from another on American airfields and send that information back to the Soviet Union.

Difficult to "Listen To"

The Pentagon said Wednesday the satellite could be of Soviet origin. Its near-polar orbit would be good for a reconnaissance vehicle. But American space scientists have learned that it is difficult to receive signals from a space traveler that is tumbling in space as this one is.

Navy trackers are keeping an eye on the object, which showed up on their electronic tracking screens about three

weeks ago. They have not picked up signals from it. But there is no way of telling whether it might have been geared to send information when triggered by some remote receiving station.

The Navy trackers estimate the object is circling the earth every 104½ minutes, sweeping over parts of the United States on some of its orbits.

Moscow has made no official comment on the mystery object. But a Soviet Sputnik expert, Prof. Alla Masevich, said yesterday in London she very much doubted that the space baby is Russian.

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